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Address of the
President of the
New Jersey Society,
for
Abolishing Slavery



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ADDRESS

OF THE

PRESIDENT

OF THE

NEW-JERSEY SOCIETY,

FOR PROMOTING THE

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,

TO THE GENERAL MEETING AT TRENTON, ON WED-
NESDAY THE 26th OF SEPTEMBER, 1804.

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ADDRESS, &c.



ALTHOUGH it has not been customary, and perhaps is not now particularly necessary, to open the transactions of this meeting with an address from the chair, yet I persuade myself, that the relation which I bear to the Society, will excuse me for claiming their attention to some observations on the general state of its affairs and objects of pursuit.

Indeed, I could wish it had been thought adviseable, to have made it the *constitutional* duty of the President, annually, to give to the Society general information, and recommend for its adoption such measures as should appear conducive to its support and usefulness.

Before I come to submit to the meeting particular propositions for consideration, and motives to diligence, I desire to take this pleasing opportunity of adverting to the origin and utility of our INSTITUTIONS for relieving and releasing the most oppressed of the human race.

“The NEW-JERSEY SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,” became constitutionally organized on the 2d of May, 1793. Through the agency of its general and district meetings, acting with unwearied diligence and prudent regulation, it has exhibited to other places an encouraging example, and produced within its own limits much of that good for which it was instituted.—They have labored with patience, and not without reward, exceeding the most sanguine hopes!

Theirs has been the satisfaction of beholding the minds of their fellow-citizens gradually giving way to a convic-

tion both of the impolicy and the wickedness of human bondage ;—of perceiving laws enacted friendly to the objects of their institution, and the treatment of masters becoming more considerate and gentle ;—of witnessing the general good conduct and dispositions of this degraded people, and their capacity for higher usefulness and more individual enjoyment ;—finally, after ten years of exertion, by writings, conversation, and continued memorials to the State Legislature, they behold the representatives of the people *uniting* in an ACT, which must at length EXTINGUISH ALL SLAVERY IN NEW-JERSEY !

How much of this change is due to the disinterested cares of this society, and what their particular merit may be, in bringing about the great law which abolishes hereditary vassalage, is not for me to estimate ;—it may be safe however to infer, that if others have co-operated, yet to this Institution must be attributed the origin, and zealous prosecution, of all the great steps which have led to so fortunate a conclusion.

Pursuing the same object, other associations in other states, and nearly of co-temporary date, have, with equal sincerity, if not with the same success, advocated the *general* right of CIVIL LIBERTY ;—they have every where carried and planted the seeds of emancipation, which, however slow they may vegetate in some soils, rendered stubborn by habits of interest and prejudice, will yet take root, and in due season mature the wished for product.

From these *local associations* has sprung an institution, which, from its elevated station and character, promises the most permanent utility—I mean the “AMERICAN CONVENTION.” This body dates its rise from a meeting in the city of Philadelphia on the 1st of *January* 1794, under the title of “*A Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies established in different parts of the United States.*” These delegates continued to meet annually (one or two years excepted) until the 12th of *January* 1803, when they became embodied under a written Con-

stitution (previously proposed to and approved by the parent associations) by the name of "*The American Convention for promoting the Abolition of Slavery and improving the Condition of the African race.*" This Constitution is simple in its form, but well designed to perpetuate its establishment, and advance the great ends for which it was formed.

I cannot but here repeat, that *much* has been effected through the agency of these charitable and disinterested societies. Could all which has been done, in the space of ten years, within the United States, by not more than *one thousand* persons thus affiliated, be presented at one view, the display would equally excite wonder and gratification!

The public sentiment has been changed, and the public laws amended;—hundreds have obtained liberation by claims made in their behalf to public judicatures—and thousands discharged by individuals, convinced at length that reason and religion condemned their title to hold, as *property*, men *created free* by ONE ALMIGHTY FATHER, and destined (for ought that we can perceive) *to common rights and happiness, both here and hereafter.* Whole States, by solemn acts of Legislation, have abrogated this condition from among them; and the great representative body of the Union, manifests a determination to prohibit foreign traffic, and promote measures favorable to the improvement and gradual emancipation of the negroes.. Nor is this change confined to mere personal liberation:—for, notwithstanding the complicated difficulties which physical, political, and local causes present, this people are *advanced* in the scale of intellectual and social existence. They are domiciled into families;—formed into religious societies;—have in some places established schools, and hundreds been taught, through private liberality, the rudiments of learning. Perceiving themselves to become objects of regard, and looking forward to a more comfortable and less abject condition, they assimilate, more and

more, to their superiors in habits of industry, and all the occupations necessary to subsistence and tending to exterior decency and social enjoyments.

It cannot fairly be denied that such has been the progress, and the *general* result, of the efforts made in the cause of emancipation.

Combining, then, what has been done, with the still greater objects to be accomplished; what motives—what powerful motives, of encouragement as well as duty, press upon us to renew and enlarge our exertions!

Under these pleasing views and impressions, yet conceiving it highly necessary to stimulate our members to engage in further plans of usefulness, I shall, with diffidence, submit a few remarks on certain *specific* subjects of consideration.

Those selected as of a nature so general and important as to justify, in my apprehension, a claim upon the deliberate attention of the state meeting are, what relates,—*First*, To the AMERICAN CONVENTION—*Second*, to EDUCATION—*Third*, to DISTRICT MEETINGS, and the *extension of membership and funds*.

First. In regard to the “*American Convention*.” This body, by one of its articles, is to be composed of representatives from the respective societies within the United States;—and, by another article, is to meet annually at Philadelphia, on the 2d Monday in January.

It must be apparent that, from the steady and wise deliberations of such an assembly, the greatest effects may be expected. Composed of the most diligent and distinguished friends of abolition—carrying with them local information from all parts—combining their measures, upon an accurate view of the whole ground, and superintending the transactions of the whole Union;—it is from that enlightened, zealous, and respectable collection of men,

we may confidently look for those comprehensive and energetic proceedings on the subject of slavery, which, while they persuade, encourage and instruct individuals of smaller associations, will reach constituted authorities, and convey to Legislatures sentiments and facts, calculated to engage governmental policy on the side of natural right and gradual emancipation.

But the continuance and force of the “ American Convention ” rests on the support of the respective associations. They must punctually send their delegates—assist in pecuniary supplies—faithfully disseminate the public proceedings of that body—and cheerfully submit to its recommendations. It is impossible to foresee the extensive good which may be produced from this *national* institution, if it is made to grow up and derive constant accessions of intelligence and vigor from the fostering care and countenance of the constituent societies.

It is not enough to have made beginnings, or even some advances :—This great evil has taken deep root, and spread wide :—Nearly *one million* or a fifth of the whole *American* population are SLAVES !—worked and bartered as beasts ;—their intellectual and moral condition as much, if not more, debased than their social and political relations. Many of the States reap from this source riches and revenue, pure representative weight in Congress ;—and thousands of wealthy and influential men in the southern States derive, from its existence and perpetuity, most of their pecuniary enjoyments and the hopes of their posterity.

Nor is it to be wished, much less expected, that sudden and general emancipation should take place. A century may and probably will elapse, though every fair exertion shall be made, before it can be eradicated from our country.

Still, however, the real philanthropist and christian should steadily pursue the best means of lessening, and, by

temperate steps, of finally extinguishing the evil. There should be no fears that any efforts, however persevering or successful, will too soon obliterate this stain from the American character. The danger rather to be apprehended is, that, as riches increase, and corruption (as it will) gains on the public morals, the spirit of active and disinterested benevolence will be diminished, if not wholly overcome, by the stronger incentives of avarice, stimulated by voluptuous and selfish passions. At least, it is the part of prudence to foresee and guard against these propensities,—and while, as yet, individual and national feelings are alive to sentiments of charity and justice, to extend and strengthen those *Public Institutions*, from whose systematic and persevering measures, alone, we may with any confidence expect general and permanent effects.—In this view of the subject, I cannot but repeat, that it appears to me a matter of the first moment for us to *support the American Convention*.

Second. Beside the great and ultimate object of total emancipation, which lies however deep in futurity, a secondary, yet more immediate, claim demands all the care and attention of our Institution—I mean the *Mental Improvement* of these people.

This is, indeed, an extensive and arduous duty :—Vain, almost worse than vain, will it be, to have procured for them the light of freedom, if no adequate means shall be pursued for rescuing them from intellectual darkness.

But how shall they acquire the means of *Education* ! It seems not within the compass of private contribution and efforts, to effect this on any general scale or within any short period of time. Of other descriptions of poor children a very large proportion go uneducated. What then is to become of the progeny of Blacks, who are now to be born free in the State of New-Jersey, and thereby to acquire the privileges of other inhabitants ? In addition to the poverty and slavery of their parents, and the scanty revenue to be procured from private munificence,

there occurs a serious difficulty in obtaining their admission (though money should not be wanting) into *white* schools. So that, even in villages and populous places, for the want of teachers of their own complexion, they may go untaught.

In reflecting on this subject, it seems to me, that the only practicable and indeed the cheapest method of extending education *throughout* this class of people will be, *to furnish them with teachers of their own condition and colour.*

If enough of these could gradually be qualified to become Tutors, and settled in proper places, they would meet with some support from the parents of the children whether free or slaves ;—and the white inhabitants of the neighbourhood would, in most cases, be induced to patronize, regulate, and assist such schools. Beside, giving to this people teachers of their own, would inspire a principle of emulation and pride, favorable to morals and refinement.

Many reasons might be suggested, would the limits of an address permit, in favor of the theory of *black* Teachers and Schools. But these, together with the project itself, must be left for detail to other persons :—I only mean to suggest the idea and the outline.

Let it then become a fixed and great object of the General Meeting, to establish a *Fund* for educating a certain number of young men or boys of colour, annually, for Teachers. Let our Society be *incorporated*, and so capable of receiving and holding property by donation, bequest and purchase. Let a *Standing Committee* be appointed to solicit from the Legislature, public bodies, and private persons, gifts, legacies, and stated subscriptions, to this fund.—How many humane and generous individuals might be induced to bear the whole expense of qualifying a boy to become the tutor of his fellow-blacks !—Let this Committee be charged to prepare a *plan* for obtaining the education of such number of boys as the fund

and other aids may authorise ;—also to devise the best general method for their establishment in proper places as they successively become fitted for the employment.

This scheme necessarily supposes a considerable lapse of time to bring it into operation ; and will require a patient, assiduous, and judicious course of management. It is susceptible of various objections, and certainly of many difficulties ; yet, without further vindicating its principle, I cannot but hope, that a *Committee on Education* might, by pursuing this or some similar system, present a plan which could be acted upon with advantage.

Under this head of *Education*, I beg to subjoin a few remarks on the duty of “ *The Committee of Publication* ” :—

It was deemed an object, worthy the attention of this Society, to nominate a Committee with that title, whose province it was, to collect and publish such original and extracted pieces as might aid the cause of emancipation. This general point being now carried, and no further step expected on it in this state, it occurs that, leaving to the American Convention, and theoretical writers, the task of conducting that department, this Committee might be *now* usefully employed in circulating among the Blacks, through the medium of the society, small, plain and cheap *manuals*, containing religious instruction ;—recommending to them, also, sobriety, honesty, and diligence ;—enjoining the practice of cleanliness, frugality, manners, and all the domestic virtues ;—and enforcing these precepts by motives most likely to operate on such understandings. These *little tracts*, being addressed immediately to them, would more excite their curiosity, and engage their observation ;—they could find means of having them read over and over again. It need scarcely, however, to be remarked, that much caution will be requisite, even on a subject apparently so simple, least offence is given. Nothing should be thus published, which can awaken any sectarian jealousies, or interfere with the order of domes-

tic subordination and authority ;—in short, they must be confined to topics on which all agree and all approve.

Third. To the subject of *District Meetings*, the *extension of Membership*, and the *Funds*, I would particularly invite the attention of this assembly.

I fear it will be proved, on an impartial view of the State Institutions, that they have not progressed in the *ratio* which was to be expected from the zeal and liberality which marked their beginnings. Symptoms of languor are too apparent ;—our funds, our members, and, may I not add, our exertions, fall short of what existed in the very outset !—If this be so, no stronger argument need be furnished to impel us immediately to devise plans for repairing and extending the means of our usefulness.

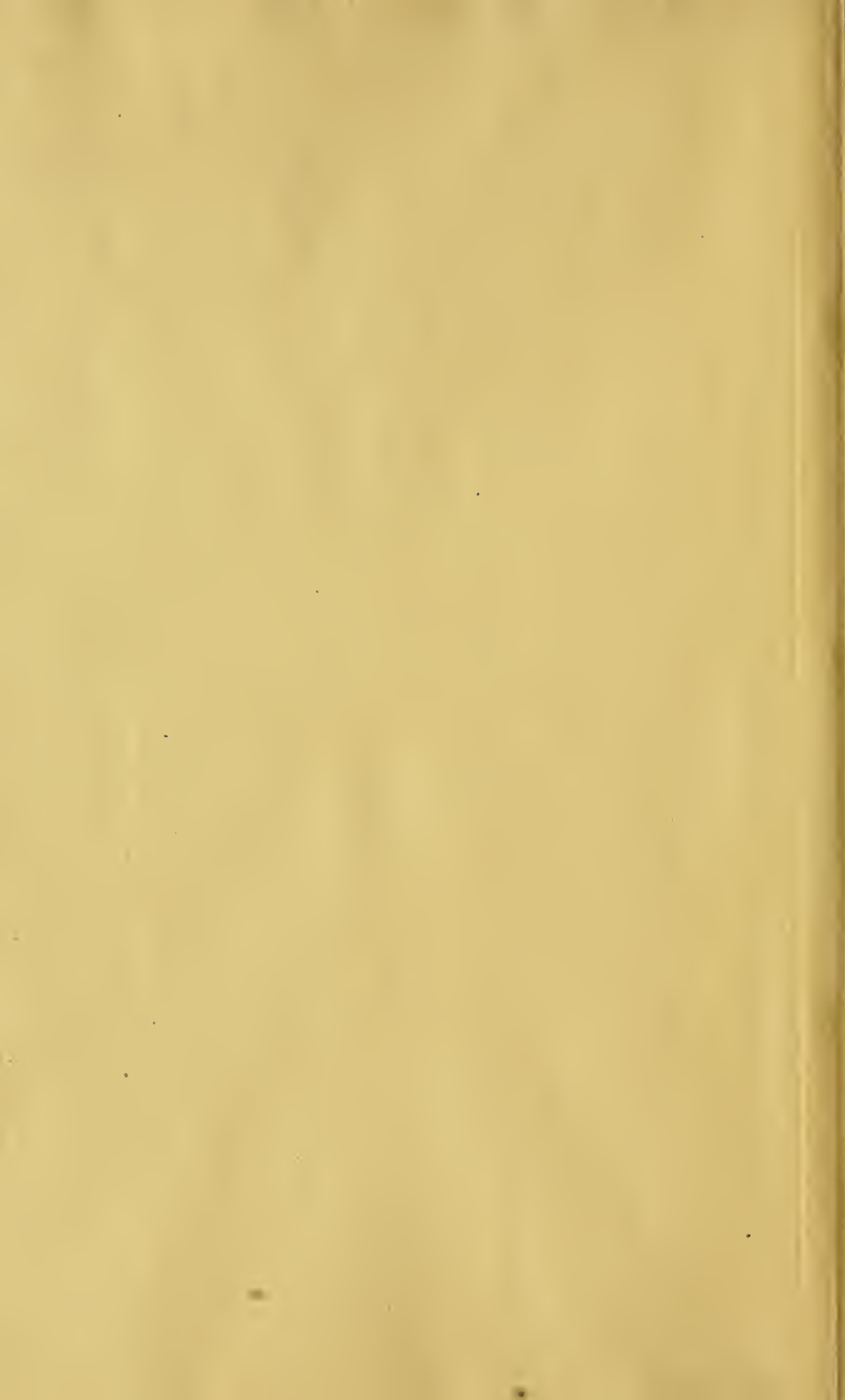
1st. In regard to the *ordinary* revenues—it should seem requisite to call on the *District Meetings* to forward to the Treasurer any monies in hand ;—to render up particular accounts of monies received and outstanding ;—and to enjoin on them the necessity of collecting from delinquent members all sums in arrear. This subject might properly be referred to the special superintendence of a *Committee*, whose duty it should be to obtain from the District meetings a full settlement.

2d. On the subject of *Membership*—it is certainly worthy the attention of the General Meeting to adopt some method for extending the sphere of association. To this end, it might be prudent to *lessen* the annual contribution, and issue recommendations to the different District meetings to appoint committees, or pursue other efficient measures, for the express purpose of promoting the establishment of new District meetings, and procuring an accession of members to the *old* ones. It is probable that the whole number of persons in active association through the whole state does not exceed one hundred and fifty ! In one half of the counties there exists no society, and, in many, not a single member. Surely, by proper exertions, Meetings could be organized in every county, and

the aggregate of members greatly increased. A particular *Committee of Membership* might be charged with the duty of transmitting to the several District meetings a proper representation on this subject. While on this head, I think it further necessary to add, that the District meetings should be urged to a *cautious* appointment of delegates to this body, and to *enjoin* on them a *punctual* attendance. The Committee of membership would also be properly charged with communicating this recommendation.

I have directed the Treasurer to lay before you his annual account,—and the Secretary to report to me on divers points of enquiry,—to some of which I shall advert in the course of the sitting. I shall not, gentlemen, further trespass on your patience, but proceed to co-operate with you, in my place, on the business which may come before the meeting.

WILLIAM GRIFFITH.



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